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ABSTRACT

This book reports on a 3-year ethnographic study of academic achievement and schooling orientations among immigrant Mexican and Mexican American students at a Houston (Texas) high school. The study included a survey of the entire student body (2,281 students), participant observation in the school and community from 1992 to 1995, 25 open-ended group interviews with students, and examination of school records and documents. The study site was chosen in part because of Mexican Americans' historical struggle for equal educational opportunity in Houston and a massive student walkout in 1989 to protest problems stemming from staff indifference, cultural insensitivity, and neglect. Findings indicate that rather than functioning as a conduit for the attainment of the American dream, this large, overcrowded, and underfunded urban school reproduces Mexican youth as a monolingual, English-speaking, ethnic minority, neither identified with Mexico nor equipped to function competently in America's mainstream. For the majority of this school's regular (non-college-bound) students, schooling is a subtractive process that divests them of important social and cultural resources and leaves them progressively vulnerable to academic failure. U.S.-born students achieve at lower levels than immigrant students, reflecting this loss of social capital, resulting alienation and division among student groups, and the absence of caring relationships between teachers and students. An epilogue suggests what additive schooling might look like. An appendix details the research methodology. (Contains approximately 180 references, notes, and an index.) (SV)

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